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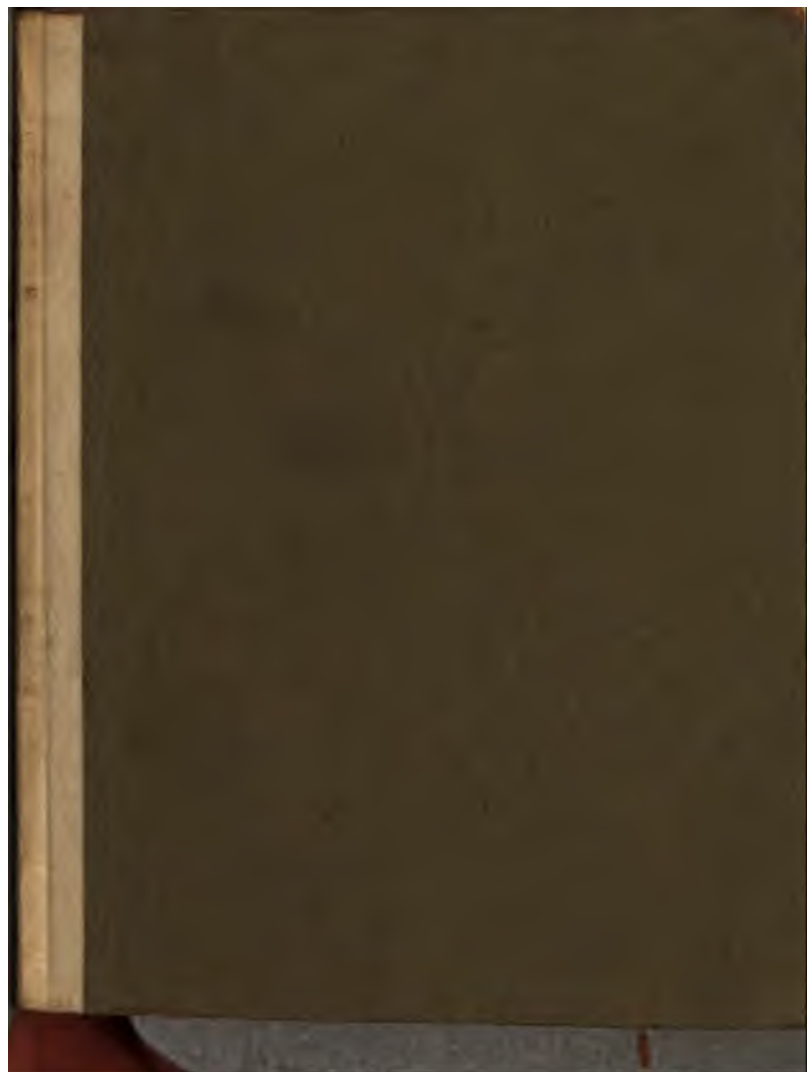
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Simple Alleluia's

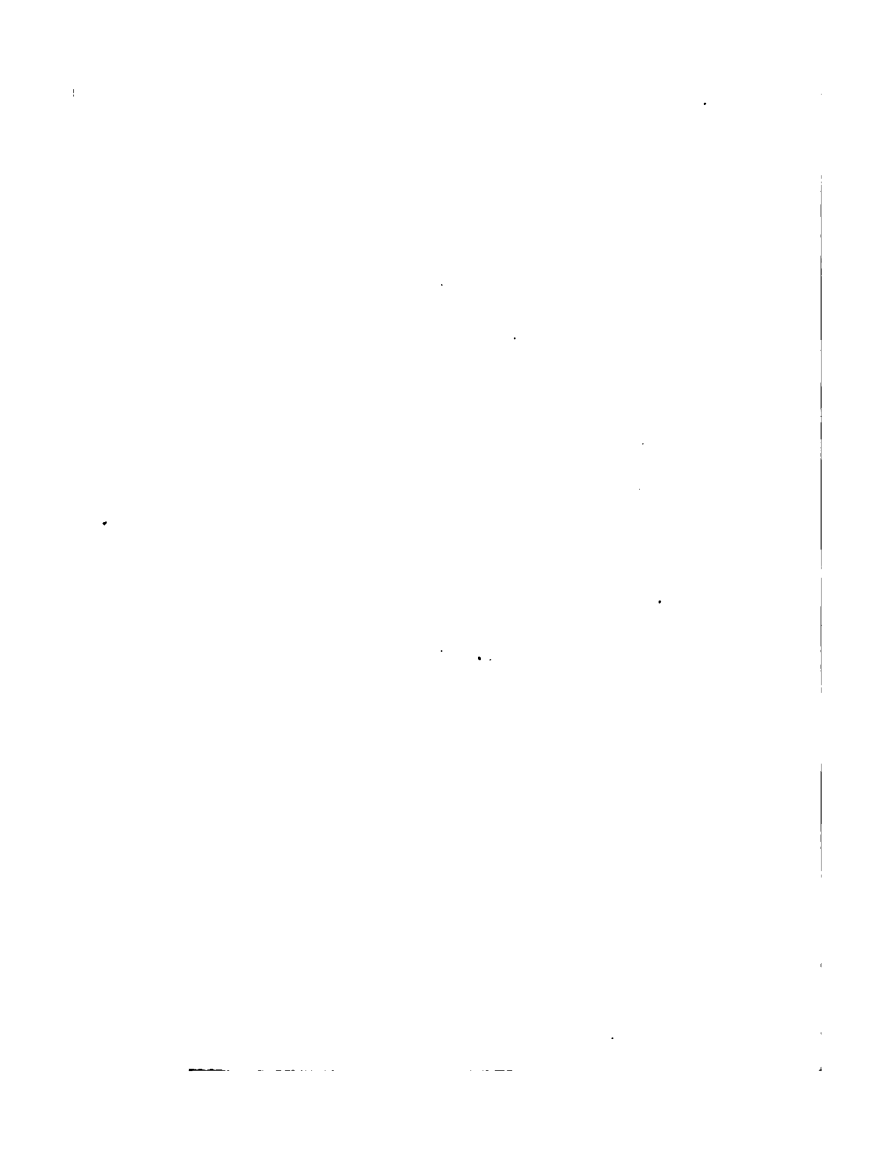


AND
Sacred Thoughts.

THE REV. H. A. FLEMING, D.D.
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WITHDRAWN
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Simple Allegories

AND

Sacred Thoughts.



Simple
Allegories
AND
Sacred Thoughts.

BY
THE REV. H. C. BLAGDEN, M.A.
CURATE OF ALDRIDGE, STAFFORDSHIRE.

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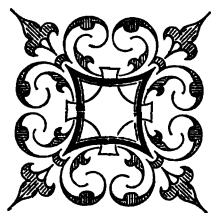
" Child-like though the voices be,
And untunable the parts,
Thou wilt own the minstrelsy,
If it flow from child-like hearts."

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

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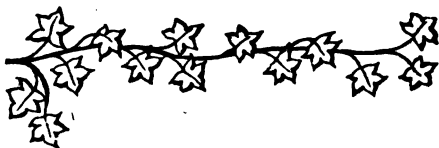
TO
THOSE WHO ARE NEITHER OFFENDED BY,
NOR DISDAIN SIMPLICITY,
THESE FEW LINES,—
WRITTEN BY ONE WONT TO TRACE AND TO LAY TO HEART
WHAT HE GATHERS OF COMFORT,
OR OF EDIFICATION,
IN THE OBJECTS OF FREQUENT SIGHT AND HOMELY
INCIDENTS OF LIFE,—
ARE HUMBLY AND RESPECTFULLY ADDRESSED.



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I.

The Passengers in the Great Ship.

AN ALLEGORY.

—
“Dear—as awakened thoughts of absent home;
And soothing—as familiar strains from far.”

REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS.

I thought I was standing on the deck of a large ship—so large that I could hardly see its entire length. It surprised me to observe that a family

likeness was visible in the countenances of each of the passengers. Numerous as these were, they looked as if they all belonged to one family. I noticed, moreover, that, though many moved about from one part to another in the vessel, most of them were stationary, seeming as if they were either disinclined, or unable, to leave their places. Some, who, apparently, could not pass to and fro, and converse with others, had sad, melancholy faces.

I watched this singular scene till evening came on.

Then nearly all took out what I fancied must be a letter, written on many sheets of paper. The instant that they began to peruse it, the wind, which had been hitherto rather stiff and rough, I could have believed, ceased its hoarse whistle. But more than this: I could have imagined I heard some one touching the melodious chords of a harp with no ordinary delicacy and expression. While I listened to this melody, I forgot for some little while where I was. When I awoke from my reverie, I perceived that a change had come over the countenances

of the readers of the writing which I had supposed to be a letter. All looked more affectionately towards one another. I especially remarked that all saddened expressions had left those who had seemed unable to join their companions in remote parts of the ship. There was now an almost settled look of content everywhere. So remarkable was this, that my own spirit felt refreshed at the sight ; and I again lost myself in a sort of dream.

When I next became conscious, the sun had risen, and the wind had returned

to the shrill key which my ears had first caught. The passengers had also already gone back to the habits and occupations which I had noticed on the day before. I was no less interested, however, in following with my eye the different groups, as far as my sight would carry me. And I fully expected that for many hours more I might busy myself with noting the different scenes on the deck.

But I had not long resumed my employment before there was once more a general movement throughout the passengers,—and the latter was, to my

wonder, taken up with the same evident and undisguised pleasure as on the preceding evening. Add to this, my ears seemed to distinguish a strain of music quite as enchanting. My curiosity was strangely excited, and, when I could rouse myself a little from the thrilling influence the melody had upon my feelings, I moved nearer to some three or four of the passengers. All these were reading attentively the same pages. Moving from them, I turned to a large knot. These, too, were occupied with exactly the same parts of the letter.

My interest grew ; I passed to several more little companies, all of whom, I found, were meditating on the words with which the first were engrossed.

Full of wonder, I immediately sought about in my mind for a meaning. But, while I conjectured over the reason or design there might be in what I had just seen, the huge ship, and the crowds of passengers, and the letter s—all had vanished. My dream was over

Then I thought that I could unravel the skein of my dream.

Those passengers in that enormous

vessel, I reflected, do not, surely, ill-resemble the mighty Brotherhood we have through Christ. All of us have entered into that Fraternity, but many are parted from one another. This my dream, I recollected, had set forth in those who were obliged to remain in one quarter of the ship. Who does not reckon amongst the best-sanctioned means of alleviating the uneasiness consequent upon this necessary trial of absence and parting the practice of all twice daily reading *the Church's course of lessons*? As the persons of whom I

dreamed gazed reverently, one and all, on *the same* part of the letter, so do humble Christians, morning and evening, even in distant regions of the world, ponder over the same chapter in the Scriptures.

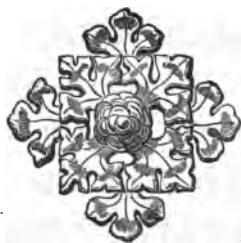
Not without a twinge of conscience, I might say, of shame, did I come to these conclusions. It was only a few days before that I had failed to see as clearly as I ought the obligation we are under to adopt the arrangement of the Prayer Book Calendar. No doubt my dream, in its minute and circumstantial details,

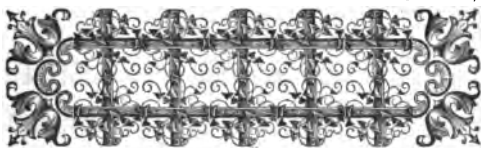
involved more abundant instruction than what I had already appropriated, but my lesson I resolved should be one of unbroken unity ! With these questions I purposed to impress the dream on my too-faithless memory. They were concentrated on one point alone ; for I feared to forget the chief moral of my dream.

When I read a portion not appointed by the Calendar *instead* of the one selected therein, do not I at least willingly break one of the most close-binding links by which Christian people

are connected together ? In self-reproach I asked myself this question ; and also these two others. Is it prudent to set aside customs, which seem almost to be special provisions of God ? Is it the part of humility to be guided by my own judgment, in preference to the collective judgment of holy and experienced men of the past and the present time ?







II.

A Summer Evening's Dream.

"With joy the Guardian Angel sees
A duteous child upon his knees."

LYRA INNOCENTUM.

IT was a summer evening. The day had been hot and sultry: I longed for the cool air. So I sauntered out in search of a haunt, where I might enjoy by

myself the refreshment I craved for. This was not difficult. I soon found myself far from all likelihood of intrusion, strolling through pleasant meadows. The cattle were grazing around with a drowsy look of enjoyment. On I went leisurely along till I came to a stile, where I sat down to rest. Here the view was more varied and less enclosed; I could catch a glimpse of a picturesque, tree-girt (the most descriptive epithet I can think of) homestead here and there looking as if reverently and fondly towards the low, square-built tower of the rural church.

The gnats in buzzing troops swarmed in the air. The breeze bore along the restless, gladly-free chimes from a spire many miles off. Nearer at hand, I could hear, every few minutes, the familiar echo of children's shouts and hurrahs in the village green. Or the distant lowing of oxen broke the silence.

Thrills, scarcely of pleasurable but almost of painful force, came over me, I felt I could only say: "I was once happy." I could not avow: "I am happy." I recollected how often for many years I had inwardly complained of half lost

happiness. I could not tell why. For my health, if not robust, had not given way. My pursuits and occupations had not been unsuccessful. I had been fortunate enough to carry into manhood the studies I had been most addicted to in my earliest youth ; and in them had had no hindrance. My kindred and relations had most of them been spared—a rare privilege to commemorate. Yet the heaviness would not be cast aside. It would, as it were, assert its earnest claim on my consideration. I brooded in a melancholy mood over this perplexity.

I thought, and went on thinking. Presently it seemed to me that I beheld a Being of a dazzling bright form stand right before me where I was seated. I noticed no part of his dress except a band which he wore on his brow. This bore an inscription,—worked in threads of gold—which at first I could not decipher. Strange to relate, I was not much frightened. I only felt I could not be the first to speak. But I was eager to hear with what voice he would speak, if he condescended to address me at all. He gazed on me with un-

common benevolence. "You need not tell me," he began, "that you are sad. I have over-heard your reflections. Besides, I am no stranger to you. Listen to me, and learn, if I cannot give you a good cause. Fear not: I cannot speak otherwise than with kindness. "You once," he proceeded, "loved to be incessantly praying. Whenever occasion threw you into privacy, you were on your knees. Child though you were, you always found words, and never wished to be told what to pray about. Your little troubles, your passing joys,

your fretting fears, your dangers, your quarrels—they all afforded you food for supplication. You were then ever-cheerful. For this assertion, I appeal to your own remembrances of your boyhood. My name is Frequent Prayer.”

I then thought I could make out the inscription embroidered on the band round his forehead.

“I am better known,” he continued, “to youth than to manhood. From a Higher World have I now arrived to remind you of the happiness you had, when you and I were more intimate.

For, as I before announced, we are not new friends. Seek me oftener," he enjoined, more radiant than ever with benevolence; "my mission is always to those who look for my presence. No man who associates much with me can be long unhappy. Are not those angel-voiced chimes confused with earthly sounds? Does not that lowly Church yonder seem to attract towards herself all the dwellings within her reach? Do not the sky and the earth, in appearance, hasten to meet in one? Thus must Heaven and Earth be blended in every

man's mind and heart. Many have, by my interposition, recovered the buoyant and sunny temper which they had lost. So may you : if you pray as often, and as heartily, as you were once accustomed."

I prepared to answer him. I opened my mouth as if for speech. Words would not come. I struggled again. Meanwhile he was gone.

I had fallen asleep; my waking thoughts had suggested the dream. It was quite dusk, so that I must have been long asleep. But I walked home with a lighter, more elastic tread, resolved, if

possible, to remember my evening's adventure, to endeavour to find out if my mysterious, unearthly visitant were right, and if my lost, much-regretted cheerfulness and sanguineness would indeed come back, as he had predicted, at my being more conversant as of old with—Frequent Prayer.





III.

The Cathedral at Midnight.

AN ALLEGORY.

—
“When these dead walls her heaven-born aid,
And secret spirit shall pervade,
Terrestrial things became divine.”

REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS.

I entered one night through a small door at the West end of a vast Cathedral. Being surprised by the tolling of the bell at a very late hour,

I walked towards the precincts of the Church. When I had reached its threshold, I was tempted to proceed further—to enter the mighty Temple. Never before was I so sensible of my extreme insignificance. How stupendous seemed the height of the Nave, in spite of its magnificent proportions! The massiveness of the huge columns was startling; my imagination was wonderstruck at the exquisite variety of ornament in each of the Capitals. At that end of the Church how awful appeared the avenues formed by the aisles!

There is something one may call supernatural in very long avenues almost impervious to light, screened, as it were, by deeply-woven foliage. On this occasion a well-nigh supernatural horror seized me. I felt like a profane and impertinent intruder. Courage or daring enough to advance, I had not.

There I stood. How long I should have remained in that place and posture had I not observed behind one of the pillars a female figure, I cannot guess. She motioned to me to come nearer. I obeyed. She neither moved nor looked

up for some time. Becoming weary with delay, I ventured in a low voice to request her to conduct me, if she might, more into the recesses of the Cathedral. At this the figure looked up at me, then, gazing intently down on the pavement, in a whisper bade, "Follow me." Half repenting my boldness, I went after her, as she directed. Stealthily and cautiously as I walked along, my feet would ring on the marble floor. The noise was intolerable. I thought it a deed of sacrilege that my feet would resound with so clear an echo. My terror, of course,

exaggerated the distance. The length of the Nave seemed immeasurable! How glad was I when my guide's arm pointed me to a pillar at no great distance from the Choir! "Look; ponder; remember;" were the three words I heard her utter.

Less embarrassed than when I was passing along the Nave, I could now again make myself acquainted with other parts of the wondrous Church into which at midnight I had penetrated, as I have described. My eyes turned towards the brilliantly-lighted Choir. Where I had ensconced myself, but one

side could be distinctly seen. Many people were within, of every age. They evinced no wonder at the richness, elaborateness, and superbness of the building and its sacred furniture, such as its carpets, hangings, and curtains. The sumptuously-carved stalls, the highly-polished and many-coloured slabs of choice marble, the star-spangled ceiling—all these (as far as I could judge) failed to elicit the curiosity of the worshippers. Not one of these, I perceived, neglected to kneel. But not a single voice was heard. This not a

little contributed towards preserving my original sensations of awe.

I had determined that of my own accord I would not move again, unless I could find a convenient opportunity. After some space had elapsed, the figure, by signals with her hand, made me understand that I might walk close up to the Gates which parted the Choir from the rest of the Church. I could then see through the Choir beyond into the Chancel. I assigned names and terms to the parts of this Church which I knew were attached to corresponding

ones in less extraordinary buildings. This, then, which from association with common Churches I called the Chancel, was so bathed in light that its architectural style and features could not be clearly defined. Only human figures were visible amid that sea (if I may use the expression) of illumination. A man in a dark robe was continually touching some worshipper, and leading him up the triple step into the Chancel. I expected he went by some rule of age. But, on closer inspection, he evidently did not.

Even children, who were kneeling, were conducted off. I strained to see what was passing beyond. And I thought I could recognize a form which had happened to strike me in the Choir, in a similar attitude in the Chancel. I, therefore, concluded that the ranks of those in the latter were recruited from those in the former division of the sacred edifice. Those in the Choir had always a momentary expression of gloom and concern at seeing the Church-apparitor come to conduct anyone thence. But the effect on those left behind seemed

to be to increase their earnestness of worship. The face of one in his devotions was so fair and beautiful, that I wished it to be imprinted on my memory. While I gazed, he too was summoned away.

The shock of regret startled me out of my slumbers.

What was the origin of this dream? The Angelus, a Church bell which even now, in some parts of England, at an early hour in the morning is known to be rung, had been heard by myself in my sleep. That had been the deep

Cathedral bell of my dream. So true it is that little and great things are side by side; so true it is that practices, even apparently unmeaning, handed down and transmitted from ancient times, though stripped of their first significance, are not without their uses. Well: the village Church bell, rung at an hour when few were astir, had, by the strange, inexplicable power of the brain in sleep, been magnified and swelled out into the majestic, measured, sonorous tone of a midnight summons to prayer in a Minster of excessive grandeur!

The brain had been busier still: it had (as I will shew) constructed a complete little allegory. The gorgeously-decorated and imposingly-built Church was the spiritual Temple into which we have severally been moulded. The vastness and strength of its parts pointed plainly to its Great Author. The well-finished ornaments, to the graces and virtues imparted by Him to baptized men and women. The figure, whose eyes were downcast, was Faith, since by her guidance, rather than "by sight, we walk." The request in the dream to be

escorted forward by the figure was an emblem of the prayer for the gift of faith. In my dream I had trembled at the ringing of my feet on the floor. It had caused almost guilty sensations. So does one, beholding sacred things by Faith, tremble at the mighty power of that high endowment. Again: the almost-silent female figure had bade me remain first of all at some little distance from the Choir. Afterwards it had suffered me to stand at the Gates. In like manner is the capacity of virtue progressive: it gains gradually in bold-

ness, vigour, and privilege. But whom did I behold, when I stood at the Choir-entrance? People mute and silent certainly, but evidently engaged in worship, and that no cold and empty homage. And does not the Christian believer, pioneered by Faith, behold all his *true* brethren, while accomplishing daily avocations, ascribing praise to God? The silent, the voiceless (if I may be permitted the word) worship might be appropriately said to image forth that kind of praise, as distinct from special praise, properly so called.

For such worship (I mean worship by acts rather than that consisting of words,) to realize it, requires faith. It is imperceptible except to her. It is silent to worldly persons ; to faith only has it a voice. Still to carry out the idea of the allegory : the worshippers' unheeding the fine and graceful works of art in the interior of the Choir, had reference to the all-absorbing devotedness of Christians, that is, devotedness and singleness of character. The black-robed personage, obviously, indicated Death : the impartiality of its visits was

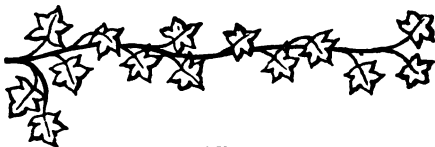
hinted at in his not giving preference to age.

Daily realities had had even more than I have yet stated to do with my dream. A very recent event would account for the peculiar turn it had taken. The day before a friend had departed; of whom I had heard that even on the day on which he breathed his last, he had not lost interest in worldly business. And was not this incessant withdrawal of *silent* worshippers to further worship in the Chancel a mirror reflecting works "following"

the dead, and perhaps (though we do not know much of this) inhabitants of Paradise still worshipping God practically, if I may introduce such language, as on earth adoration is given by manly, consistent, undeviating attention to the demands of what are usually designated secular duties ?







IV.

The Beacon.

AN ALLEGORY.

—
“ Steadfast, serene, immovable, the same
Year after year, through all the silent night
Burns on for evermore that quenchless flame,
Shines on that inextinguishable light.”

LONGFELLOW.

“ Right welcome are you, my son ;
my aged eyes are gladdened by
seeing you here in my mountain-home.”
These words were spoken by an old man .

to one in the prime of youth. The young man's face beamed with joy at such a welcome. He had expected only austerity, abruptness, and imperiousness. For many a month he had postponed his visit. The old man led a solitary, self-denying, and somewhat ascetic life; he was reputed, in consequence, to be morose and harsh-tempered. People said that he had accumulated some learning, but not such as would attract or please active and enterprising minds. Most regarded his house, in fact, as the abode of bigotry, narrow-

mindfulness, and dulness. It accordingly required some fixedness and honesty of purpose to combat and master the prejudice he had conceived against this unpopular person ; and no little moral courage to surmount the malignant contempt he would encounter, if he frequented his house, and were known to become one of his scholars. A mind, however, really enquiring, and bent on securing information, in time must think lightly of such difficulties. On a matter which had long and painfully occupied his mental faculties he

could not get satisfaction. This person alone remained whom he could consult. To him, then, would he go.

It was when he had at last carried out his intention, and knocked at the long-dreaded door, that he was accosted in the way related above. At other times the exertion of climbing the mountain-paths would have been scorned as nothing. But agitation, and uncertainty how he would be received, and whether his questions would be answered satisfactorily, made him breathless and little fit for opening a conversation.

The old man did his best to re-assure him. With winning courtesy, he desired him to sit down. "You shall tell me, when you are rested," he said, "what you have to recount. You may rely upon my labouring to relieve you of what weighs on your mind." The young man, still not quite collected, but yet somewhat more calm, replied that he would wish, without delay, to inform him of the reason of his venturing to interrupt his solitude. "Have no scruples," the Hermit returned, "about intrusion. Though I live alone, I am not

selfish enough not to be ready at all times to listen to all enquirers, particularly young and ardent ones, to which class, if I do not judge hastily, you belong. Proceed, then, with your disclosure, if you are not disposed to wait longer. You may reckon upon my profound attention. May it be granted me to afford you any assistance, and to lighten the weight you have upon you !”

After that persuasive address, the youth could no longer, through timidity, suppress his story.

“ I dreamed that I saw on an immense

and almost boundless extent of high table land, a beacon sending out in all directions streams of flame. I fancied that the same extraordinary phenomenon was visible for a long time. Hour after hour it went on burning. More than once I beheld a very small band of individuals carrying up faggots and fuel for feeding and nourishing the fire. Not only was it a small band, but composed of men in exceedingly indigent circumstances. Suddenly soldiers—armed soldiers—were seen behind them. They (that is, the poor men) were

arrested, rudely and harshly assaulted, and, finally, dragged off—I supposed to death, for they never came up again. But yet others, as meanly clad, and from the same class of society, took their places. Again and again the same scene of the ruffian-soldiers took place. With these sometimes were mingled sedate, dignified magistrates and persons whom I considered must fill important civil offices and professions. These looked as if they were reasoning and expostulating with the men who were maintaining and protecting the beacon-flames.

Their arguments, however, seldom had any effect. If they had any, it was never lasting. In revenge, as I took it, for being baffled by the obstinacy of men so beneath them in station, the civil authorities consigned them to the custody of the armed guards. But by and bye, here and there, I saw persons of a higher and more substantial class join those who first cherished the fire. They carried the same loads of wood; throwing them on to the burning piles with the same activity, readiness, and spirit. The glare in the skies became

a deeper crimson—the whole heavens being suffused with the fiery-red colour. It was a magnificent, a soul-stirring sight!”

He paused, and, smiling up at the old man, exclaimed, “ This uncommon dream have I had.” The venerable old man’s eye sparkled with interest! “ Pray go on with your story.”

Encouraged by such kindness, he caught up the thread of his narrative. “ That part of my dream, confused as it was, gave me nothing but pleasure. But other scenes followed, different, in some respects, to those on which I have

just expatiated. At witnessing these, pain, perhaps, predominated over other feelings. The beacon was not extinguished. Far from it; busy groups still clustered round it. But I thought them very different persons. Dress, manner, habits—everything altered. Princes and nobles (if their handsome robes were any sign of high and royal birth) were there. Sometimes they themselves really threw fuel on the huge flames. At other times they would command menials to do so, and insist that their rank must be a plea for their exemption. What almost

agonized me (when such unmanly persons were around) was a fear that soon all would be quenched, and that nothing would remain but ashes. My alarm was great. Instead of exerting themselves to sustain what was evidently set up as a beacon and signal of some sort, most of the men, I saw, stood almost idle. But some were worse than idle: they were wasting their strength and time in contentions and quarrels. Yet even then there were a few whom a spectator would have called industrious in cherishing the gigantic fire. With new energy

they re-kindled the almost-expiring embers. And then, a little aside, the same men were seen in careful deliberation, as if they feared some crisis. Many of these anxious assemblies passed before my gaze. After which I observed that the beacon seemed less likely to die out. Again—alas!—open enemies, false friends, indolent by-standers were seen. I felt that the fiery standard would soon be hardly recognizable.

“Listen,” he interposed with some warmth. “Listen to but a few more particulars of this strange night-vision.

“After I had witnessed those spectacles, I fancied nearly all round the beacon were asleep. One here and there awake. But private, individual efforts were hardly of any use. Nearly everything and everybody seemed immersed in darkness. . . . Suddenly, to my infinite joy and relief, I could see first one, then another, afterwards many others, start up, as if sensible of their danger, rouse their comrades, sound alarm-bells, hasten out for sustenance for the beacon-flame! From that time, it never threatened any signs of perish-

ing. Ardour, energy, strength—all were there. The crowds round the beacon universally displayed care and perseverance in maintaining what it evidently was their province to preserve and uphold. Nay more; I dreamed that I had ceased to be a *solitary* spectator of this unquenchable light; and that I could see many below, with myself, watching, with no feigned interest, the far-seen and safety-bringing beacon. Many I had fancied before would mock, when I pointed up to the table-land and the sky almost in a blaze, as it were, with the reflected

light. But at this energetic restoration and renewal of, that anomalous appearance, thousands looked up to it with steadfastness. Thousands, convinced (it would appear,) with myself, that it was set up for some beneficent purpose of no small magnitude, prayed that it might ever burn with the same wide-spreading lustrousness; and that the whole world might be partakers of its glorious illumination!"

The old man, almost impatient from triumph at having long ago fathomed the secret of the young man's dream, and

delighted with the enthusiasm of his youthful scholar, burst out the moment he paused in his glowing narrative :

“ I can unfold your dream. Your knot is untied. Your beacon was a representation of Holiness in the Church of God. It was the saintliness communicated to the body of those people whose ‘ lights ’ are to ‘ shine before men. ’ The ignoble men who cherished it, were the Blessed Apostles, victorious confessors, and brave martyrs. Your fierce, blood-thirsty soldiers, attending on the pleasure of dignified magistrates, were the mock

trials which adjudged Christians to barbarous executions, and so unjustly distorted their purity and virtue. The first stage in your story (I consider) corresponded to the era of the Great Constantine, under whose protection and patronage the Church was enriched with earthly distinction and repute. The interminable, almost deadly, feuds between Arians and Catholics your dream then drew, as it were, before your view; the bold encroachments of worldliness, heresy, and errors in all their hideously multiform shapes; and the irretrievable schism

between the Greek and the Latin communions. Your active groups, that retired aside for consultation, were represented by the Ancient Councils and Synods, whether œcumenical, provincial, or diocesan. Those who worked, when others were inactive, reminded me of an Athanasius, an Ambrose, an Augustine, a Chrysostom ; and (to go on to later eras) a Gregory the Great, a Bede, an Anselm, a S. Bernard. The demands that rank must exempt one from personal exertions in feeding the flame you may consider as a picture of that sad period

(during which, numberless crusades were going on, in the East, against the Mahomedans, and, even in Europe, against the Albigenses, and others, whose doctrines had a similar bias) when bishops, abbots, and churchmen of high station interfered in politics, and not only politics, but war—war of aggrandisement, ambition, and cruelties. This part of history, you will now see, your story rather anticipated, for, in strict order of time, you ought to have assigned it a different place.

“ But your dream exhibited men at a far later period sensible of the perilous

consequences of indolence. Who were these but Wycliffe, and, more than a century later, Luther, Erasmus, Melancthon, Latimer, Ridley, and men of kindred minds and characters? The revival of holiness, sound doctrine, and zeal for religion throughout Europe at the Reformation, was that glorious re-kindling of the beacon. When you related, 'from that time, it never threatened any signs of perishing,' my thoughts irresistibly recalled those well-honoured names of Andrewes, Hooker, Herbert, Hammond, Laud, Ken --well-honoured for, what I am

tempted to call, their 'beacon-like' piety and goodness.

“ Enough : I myself, of whom you have heard strange and hard reports, whose learning is accounted outlandish and useless ; I myself, my friend, am a figure, as I fancy, of those studies, which will enlarge more worthily than I can upon the course, fortunes, and prospects of the appearance that so disquieted you in your remarkable dream. Those studies do not attract the gay and the frivolous. They are proscribed as depressing, and unprofitable, and

old-fashioned. Yet as I have now been able to divulge what has long been a perplexing secret to you, so may men find (and, happily, men now in large numbers often do find) that there are incalculable profit, pleasure, and instruction in Church History."

Imagine the young man's satisfaction at finding that the despised, misjudged, student was enlightened enough to discover, as if intuitively, the signification of the dream, which had so baffled all conjecture and speculation. Was he not, think you, reader, eager to embrace,

with all his youthful powers of application, a study promising to afford such delightful and available results?





—

“Till life’s journey closed, the spot
Was to the Pilgrim’s soul endeared.”
WORDSWORTH.

IN a very secluded country church,
in one of the Midland Counties, on a
bright Sunday morning in summer, this
little incident took place.

^a Reprinted from “The Penny Post.”

There being in a retired churchyard no fear of annoyance from having the door wide open, the entrance by a low, old-fashioned south porch had not been closed while prayer was going on. The Nicene Creed was over, and the clergyman went down the aisle to the vestry at the west end of the church. On returning, happening to look aside at the open door, he observed two men sitting in the porch. He stopped a moment, on his way to the pulpit, to speak to them, and urge them to come within. They were miserably clad, and, indeed,

pleaded their shabby dress as an excuse for not entering. One man replied to the clergyman's invitation—"Very good," but made no effort to move. He begged them once more to come in and hear the Gospel of Christ, and, briefly reminding them of its pricelessness, (time forbad more,) left them.

The clergyman's mind, perhaps, was disposed to dwell rather earnestly on this little occurrence, as he was fresh from the sound of that peculiarly touching Gospel which depicts the sheep-owner seeking for the one sheep he had lost,

and his joy at having recovered it. He began, therefore, when the service was concluded, and he was walking home through quiet lanes,—with every object and sound about him that would keep alive earnest and impassioned thought,—to reflect upon what had passed.

“What a parable was that!” (he pondered to himself.) “These poor men were evidently getting rest and shelter from the sun in the church porch. Most likely they had travelled on foot a long distance, and, as if by chance, come up to this secluded spot. Who knows on

what errand they were journeying—whom they were to meet—what mischievous, or even criminal, scheme they had in their heads? May not their resting unexpectedly have quite turned the current of their plans and intentions? If the career of both men were not materially altered and diverted, may not the life and conduct of one of the two have been saved from ruin and disgrace? Perhaps one may have reason to remember for all his remaining days the humble porch where he took shelter. How true, then, it is that the blessed tree of

the Church, with her wide-spreading branches, gives coolness, refreshment, and protection even to those who know nothing of her! Again; when those who have long been wandering in the hot and dusty ways, as it were, of a 'troublesome world' just *approach* the threshold of the Church, the travellers are welcomed with unthought-of tranquillity. Nay, one steps forward in the most loving mercy to those who are seeking shelter from scorching temptations. He wishes them to receive still *fuller* spiritual hospitality. For however

feebly, however fearfully, or however ineffectually, I recommended them to come within, and listen to the words of life, one can hardly help thinking of the pity of Him Whose words they are, and how all may ever *enter* into 'perfect peace' through Him, the Door,—especially those who have already found their way *near* Him. And what truths yet remain ! These miserable wayfarers are the most vivid figures of those who, when the gate of joy and peace is open afresh, and before their very eyes, will yet keep outside. They behold the entrance to new

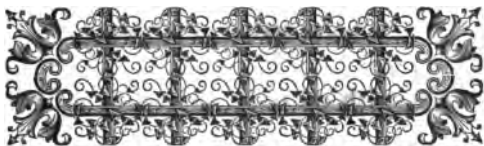
life,—for these acknowledged the truth of what I said,—but shrink from passing through. And meanwhile the church-door was wide open. As each clause of the sermon was ended, and another had to follow, there was yet time; their opportunities were not yet gone all of a sudden. So God's loudest and most tender calls have their echoes, as it were, and are succeeded by *many* softer voices."

This is a simple tale told in perfect artlessness. It is to be hoped that it has at least a grain or two of those engaging properties which are said to be-

long to a true story of human woe and joy. Moralizing was very far from the thoughts, when it was written. Merely to sketch off a rather striking incident that happened in a retired hamlet-churchyard—that was all that was done. And it is much desired that the humble record, if read, will be regarded strictly as an unadorned tale, without any straining at pointing a moral.







VI.

A Poor Man's Question.^b

"The poor, oppressed, honest man
Had never, sure, been born,
Had there not been some recompense
To comfort those that mourn."

BURNS.

A stirring, enterprising city resounds
with the heavy clang and murmur
of traffic and pleasure-making along its
ancient streets. The river, guarded, as

^b Reprinted from "The Penny Post."

it were, with its noisy quays, is crowded with vessels freighted with every kind of precious burden. Its waters seem black with weariness—as if it were almost exhausted at having for many a long year been the chief channel for conveying importance and opulence to those by whose habitations it has flowed.

A few casual visitors to this city, so sleeplessly and undauntedly committed to the search for gold, are crossing over the river in a ferry-boat. As the ferryman pushes off from the bank, he enters into conversation with his companions.

Taking courage from their friendliness and unreserve in talking on passing topics, he wishes to "make bold," and put a question to one of them. He is a poor, weather-beaten, unpolished-looking man. His dress and person unmistakeably betoken with what rude fare he has to be content. This man, then, toil-worn and haggard as he is, briefly and artlessly enquires, to the surprise of his listeners, "At what time was Christ born?"—giving expression to the inquiry by a look brightening with interest.

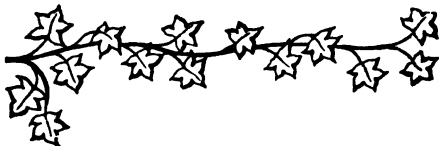
What is the time of the Sinless

Infant's birth to him?—poor outcast from the world's refinement and intelligence! Just this: when he has returned at night to his cheerless home, and the half-empty streets mockingly glitter with their lights, and the comfortable, luxurious houses, with their bright-red windows, seem to gaze upon him with unfeeling selfishness, or when, in early morning, while most are taking their rest, he comes out, cold and hungry, his heart will grow warm again with courage and gratitude, for he knows that Christ, as Man, was born for our sakes

at Bethlehem, at midnight or early morning. Some strange sort of consciousness he will have pervading his honest, manly heart, that he is like the Saviour in going to and from a life of painful labour—in ignorance (as far as experience is concerned) of the world's garish delights and ease. He will be ready even with a smile, or courteous word, while he ferries his load over the river. When he grasps the few paltry pence as the fare across the river with his horny hand, he will remember these blessed tidings, and wish an eternal

reward for those who treated him with such ready civility and blandness. He will thank God that his calling, laborious and precarious as it is, may lead him into interesting and profitable intercourse with strangers.

Surely, as well might we think lightly of the message of the angels to the shepherds near the city of David, as of that hard-labouring, unlettered man (of this nineteenth century) who, somewhat abruptly, showed his eagerness for information about the time at which our Holy Lord was born into this guilty world !



VII.

Nature our Consoler.*

—

“The herbs we seek to heal our woe
Familiar by our pathway grow,
Our common air is balm.”

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

Amongst parochial duties, this will often occur of having to administer religious consolation by the bed-side of a sick child. Information of the danger-

* Reflections under the impressions made by a real case.

ous illness of a young person has in it something peculiarly distressing. This peculiar painfulness does not arise (God forbid) from any uncertainty as to the future awaiting the child in mortal sickness. But the gentle ways of the little sufferer touch one to the quick, because we behold affliction in its most mysterious aspect—in the aspect in which the Mothers of the Holy Innocents beheld it, when they were massacred by King Herod. One is aware that now it is out of the child's power to express any particular wish for anything it may need.

Perhaps even it may not occur to so young a mind to send of its own accord for the pastor. Such considerations must certainly quicken the movements of any one summoned to attend upon a case of this kind. One feels under a special obligation to lose not a moment—even more so than when one's presence is requested for one of full age. It may be a festive season—such as Christmas or Epiphany—when such an occurrence befalls one. The outer world may present a contrast to the joyous character of the period in the Ecclesiastical year.

The clergyman, perhaps, will have to wade through miry lanes,—nearly enveloped in a chilly, penetrating mist. A murmur may be almost on his lips at Nature's weeping and decking herself in mourning attire. While he is proceeding to the discharge of his melancholy, although blessed and honourable, office, he may half complain that everything appears to conspire to deny him encouragement. Let him, however, still wend his pleasantless, unenviable way. Perhaps outer things will relax their stoical sternness. On raising his looks

upwards, there is yet a chance of this. A few paces only from his place of destination, Nature, as if sorry for having so long disappointed him, may shew him kindness. His eye, as if by accident, (it is not impossible,) observes a bird occupied in carrying off for its nest a shred of straw. So simple and familiar an operation hardly, ever, perhaps, had power enough before to arrest his attention. But, when his mind is deeply affected at the thought of the descent of a storm of sorrow on a happy roof, and he is sensible that he must, as it

were, furnish himself with solace against the coming necessity, it is not wonderful that so common a process has significance, and preaches a gentle, well-timed, affecting sermon.

The sight before, and the sight awaiting, him exhibit a beautiful harmony. As the robin (who never doffs his gay, red festival dress) is mirthfully flying off with the straw for its home above the cold, damp ground, so the innocent child (sick unto death) will soon nestle in the boughs of the trees of Paradise. The little red-breast hurries away, laden

with what it has found on earth—even on an inclement, wintry day. Thus it is that the child is about to gladly wing its flight hence, with all the pure affections, feelings, and aspirations, it has exercised and indulged on earth ready to be brought into use, in some degree, in a more ethereal place. Even this sorrowful, pain-laden world has reared something not unmeet, by Christ's grace, for the Garden of departed saints. Calamity would take the bereaved less by surprise, and find them more susceptible to addresses of consolation, if

they would hearken to this short sentence in one of Nature's beautiful expositions of God's Truth : " Construct yourselves, through His help, a home and a treasure-house far away hence, where His Throne is set fast for evermore ; you will escape as in a moment from the thickening mists of sorrow, disappointment, and depression."

But Nature is no *class*-preacher, her exhortations and her consolations are for *all*. Therefore also, through this tender sermon of her's, from the pastor's sympathizing heart are banished

perplexity and diffidence,—perplexity, how he will shake off his mournful reflections, and diffidence, as to his ability to speak fluently and intelligibly enough for those stupified with grief. In a word : as if convinced and taught by the little blithesome creature of the air, he builds up and makes compact his trust in *Heaven*, by an earnest prayer to God from earth !^d

^d See “ Christian Year ” for the twenty-first Sunday after Trinity, for some exquisite and touching verses depicting the soothing effect of the red-breast’s *note* upon the pensive Christian Minister. Those remarkably beautiful lines may be said to have made the red-breast, amongst the winged songsters around us, as well with regard to its *habits* as its *song*, the special and privileged comforter of the desponding Pastor.



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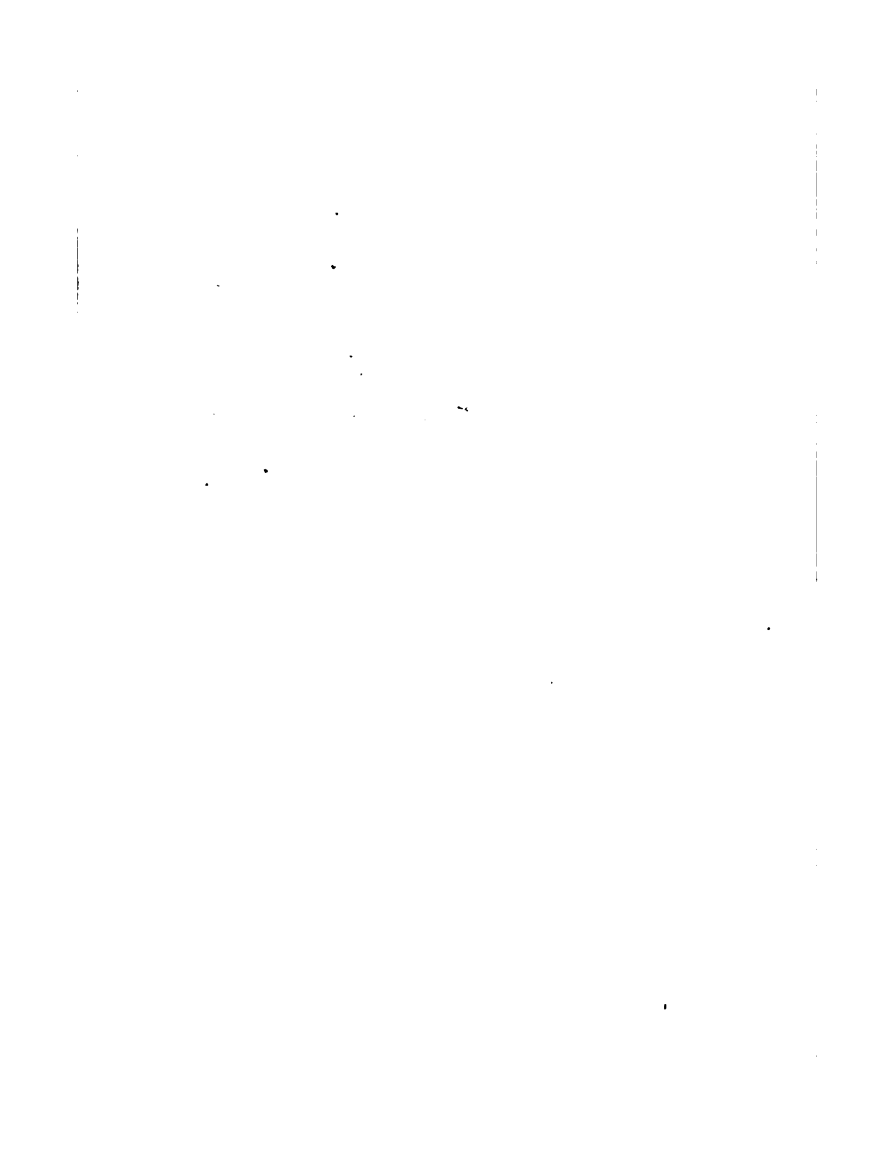
ERRATA.

Page 31, line 3 in the inscription, for "became" read "become."

Page 47, line 2, for "known" read "know."

Page 80, line 7, erase "yet" after "not."

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